

Hesperia district says yes-yes to airport security no-nos

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Video: [Hesperia schools make use of secondhand items](#)

Brandi Bawn lost her orange-handled scissors.

They lie amid a jumble of pliers, corkscrews, cheese cutters, more scissors and Swiss Army knives -- lots of Swiss Army knives. Bawn's name is printed neatly across the thumb handle of the scissors she had to give up when she passed through security at the airport. In the post- 9/11 era, such sharp implements are not allowed as carry-on items on planes.

Nor are such things as hockey sticks, bolt cutters, steel-tipped darts, food processors, crescent wrenches and hunting knives. These and other items fill plastic bins in the warehouse of the Hesperia Unified School District.



Carrie Rosema / The Press-Enterprise
Dennis Ebert, the property control agent for Hesperia Unified School District, shows off some of the items he's collected from airport screening stations and other surplus sources.

If you've ever wondered what happens to the material surrendered to security officers at airport screening stations, wonder no more.

Every few weeks, Dennis Ebert travels to one or more of Southern California's major airports -- the only one he doesn't visit is Los Angeles International Airport -- to collect the material passengers surrender before they clear security.

The thousands of pounds of material he ends up with is picked through by the district's maintenance crews, custodians, teachers and administrative staff. Knives and other items that are inappropriate for the classroom are transferred to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, where they are converted, along with other weapons, into metal rebar.

But the airport material is only a small portion of second-hand or surplus goods the school district utilizes.

It is tapped into state, federal and private sources that make surplus material available to government and nonprofit agencies, providing the district with everything from scissors -- such as Bawn's -- to service vehicles. In the past four years, Ebert says, the second-hand material has saved the district \$2 million. The district began its program in earnest in 2003.

"We don't put anything new in classrooms any more unless we have to," Ebert says. "I go from Sacramento to San Diego to recover stuff."

Beth Mills, spokeswoman for the state's Department of General Services, says the Hesperia district is the "most active school district to use the federal (and state) donation program."

Ebert points to a stack of computer towers on one of the warehouse loading platforms. The U.S. District Court in Riverside recently upgraded its computers, he says. The school district got all of the old ones.

In another warehouse, there are rows of desks, chairs, bookcases and other furniture, all eventually destined for administrative offices or classrooms.

School Saves \$42,000



Carrie Rosema / The Press-Enterprise
Sarahi Parra, Jasmine Lopez and Serenity Smith, third-graders at Kingston Elementary School in Hesperia, work in a computer lab where much of the equipment came from a donation program.

The program is voluntary, Ebert says, and some schools participate more than others. Teri Green is principal of Kingston Elementary School, one of the most active in the district. She says the surplus program has saved her

school \$42,000 in the past 18 months. That includes office furniture and classroom cabinetry, but most of the savings has been in donated computers.

The school's computer learning specialist, Kevin Riley, says the surplus computers have allowed the school to plan for a second lab that will open shortly. It will double the amount of time kids have on the computers.

"We're probably the only elementary school with two computer labs and without (the program), there's no way we could have two," Green says.

Instead of being limited to a single weekly session, Riley says, "Now the classes can come in two times a week for 45 minutes each."

"Because it frees up dollars," says Green, "it allows us to put those dollars other places."

One such place, she adds, is the school's plans for a mobile computer lab that would provide laptops and wireless Internet access to students.

Clothes Closet

While most of the surplus material is utilized on a school-by-school basis, Ebert has one program that is districtwide.

"We have what we call the clothes closet," he says, showing off boxes of new shoes and clothing, including pajamas and winter-weight jackets that are available to underprivileged students. "We arrange a shopping program for them where they earn credits and they can purchase clothes."

But they can't purchase scissors or any of the other material that comes from the local airports' security screenings. Ebert also gets the airports' unclaimed lost-and-found articles, which include such things as eyeglasses, walkers and the occasional oddball item such as the 12-inch-high Sean Connery 007 figure atop the filing cabinet in Ebert's office.

He says his supervisor handed it to him out of a pile of airport junk one day.

"He said, 'You need to put this in your office.' And I said, 'Why?' " Ebert recalls, noting that he is the district's property control agent. "He said, 'Because you're the only agent we've got.' "

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